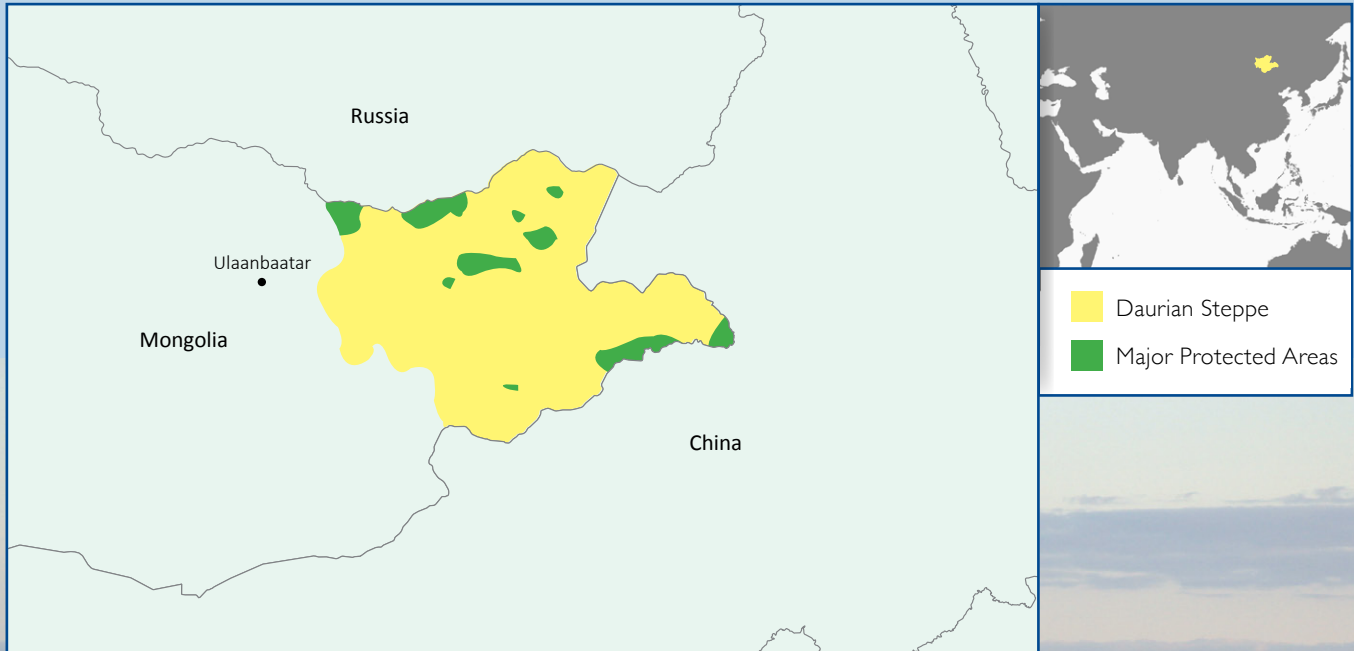




USAID
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SCAPES LANDSCAPE PROFILE: THE DAURIAN STEPPE LANDSCAPE



MONGOLIA, 2014: Sunrise over Lake Chukh, an important wildlife area. Photo by Matthew Erdman for USAID

THE DAURIAN STEPPE LANDSCAPE AT A GLANCE

- The landscape stretches across Russia, Mongolia and China, covering 250,000 square kilometers.
- The project was implemented by the Wildlife Conservation Society.
- The project leveraged \$134,000 from donors other than USAID.

THE PLACE AND THE PEOPLE

The Daurian Steppe is vast, remote and sparsely populated. Straddling Russia, China and Mongolia, it contains one of the world's last intact temperate grassland ecosystems and is home to more than 1 million Mongolian gazelle, the largest aggregation of nomadic ungulates on earth. It also hosts dozens of endemic mammals such as the Siberian marmot, Daurian souslik, Brandt's vole, Daurian hedgehog and Daurian zokor. The steppe is a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, in part because it is the heart of the East Asian-Australasian flyway, and an important breeding, molting and migration stop for endangered Siberian cranes and vulnerable bird species such as white-naped cranes, hooded cranes, swan goose, great bustard, relict gull and various raptors.

The Daurian Steppe is also home to thousands of people and their 60 million livestock. Livestock herders make up 30 percent of Mongolia's population,

and they directly depend on healthy grassland to survive. But threats to the landscape abound. They include unsustainable hunting, poaching, road and rail development, mining and oil extraction, overgrazing and the clearing of land for agriculture. Increasing numbers of livestock bring a greater susceptibility to foot-and-mouth disease and its potential transmission to wildlife, such as gazelle.

Maintaining the integrity of the land and traditional pastoralist livelihoods requires engaged citizens, a constituency that advocates for conservation. This, however, is complicated by the fact that the Daurian Steppe contains 2,000 kilometers of international borders, large protected areas, international trade routes and transit corridors. In such an environment, outreach and communication is needed to forge common interests and promote concerted action.



MONGOLIA, 2014: WCS SCAPES Director David Wilkie talks with program staff on the Daurian Steppe. Photo by Matthew Erdman for USAID

THE CHALLENGE

The Daurian Steppe was one of nine transboundary landscape-scale efforts under USAID's Sustainable Conservation Approaches in Priority Ecosystems (SCAPES) project. SCAPES had two main goals in the Daurian Steppe: build a transboundary constituency for conservation and development planning, and reinforce a community-based model for wildlife and livestock management.

It pursued these goals through a variety of strategies. For example, the implementing partner, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) encouraged collaboration among scientists and conservationists across borders through workshops and meetings with partners in the veterinary, agricultural and wildlife sectors to find common solutions to halt regional disease outbreaks such as foot-and-mouth disease. To educate the public and raise awareness, the project produced fact sheets, training materials and newspaper articles about the results of these gatherings.

WCS also conducted citizen outreach and communication campaigns. Drawing on national pride, the project highlighted the value of conserving the Mongolian gazelle and the white-naped crane, iconic animals in the grassland and wetland ecosystems, respectively. By the end of the project, 94 percent of people surveyed in Mongolia had heard about the campaign and 50 percent had seen a television broadcast about wildlife law enforcement activities and patrols.

The project helped establish and support 11 local Herder Community Groups to manage the coexistence of wildlife, livestock and people, and to use natural resources in a sustainable way. These community groups allowed communities to secure formal rights over their pasture lands and watering spots, while the project taught them to conduct volunteer ranger patrols and link with government law enforcement activities. For example, the Chukh Herder Community Group chose to limit the amount of time herders can access Chukh Lake, which has led to improved stream flow and water quality. The lake is now a nesting site for cranes and geese, and an important feeding site for 45 migratory bird species. To capitalize on the return of waterfowl, WCS helped the community build a bird-watching tower, and an ecotourist camp now welcomes visitors.

The project helped create Mongolia's first multi-agency team to combat poaching and address the illegal wildlife trade. By sharing the experience and authority of the Police Department, Intelligence Department, Customs Agency and Specialized Agency, Environmental Protection Agency and the Eastern Mongolia Protected Area Authority, the team used 100 rangers and inspectors to bring about 100 prosecutions for violations of wildlife laws. Prior to this multi-agency team, national authorities in Mongolia rarely coordinated their activities or shared intelligence.



DORNOD, MONGOLIA, 2012:
Herder association workshop
to develop a management plan.
Photo by WCS

THE LESSONS

To prevent livestock and domestic dogs from destroying the eggs and chicks of white-naped cranes, WCS built fences in priority wetlands to establish permanent breeding sanctuaries. This was a sensitive decision, however, because those wetlands are vital water sources for livestock. Managing the expectations of community members required not only diplomacy, but also transparency and communication.

Scaling up community work, particularly through Herder Community Groups, was difficult because

the structures for supporting communities was different in each country. Russia had more permanent herder settlements, while in China, higher population densities and top-down approaches were not suited to the strategies developed in Mongolia, where herders are semi-nomadic. Furthermore, community work among semi-nomadic cultures is complicated, because community networks are often defined as family instead of neighbors. Coordination within communities and organizing meetings can be difficult because of the large distances and poor roads that separate neighbors.



EASTERN STEPPE KHENTII AIMAG, MONGOLIA, 2012: WCS staff conducting a social survey with a herder community. Photo by WCS